

Wellbeing and perceptions of receiving support among Church of England clergy during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The present study draws on the responses of 1496 Church of England clergy who participated in the *Coronavirus, Church & You* online survey between 8 May and 23 July 2020 to explore the impact of the lockdown on clergy wellbeing and perceptions of receiving support from their household, the parish, the diocese, and the national church. The data distinguished between five aspects of wellbeing: fatigue, disengagement, positivity, closeness to people, and closeness to God. As a result of lockdown clergy perceived large increases not only in fatigue and disengagement, but also in positivity. While as a consequence of the lockdown clergy felt less close to people, they felt closer to God. The data also showed that, although the perception of being supported by the national church was highly effective in reducing disengagement, this perception was shared by less than a quarter of the clergy.

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Introduction

The work-related psychological health and wellbeing of Anglican clergy within the Church of England and the Church in Wales have been the subject of a series of quantitative studies conducted since the early 1990s. These studies have conceptualised and operationalised the notion of work-related psychological health and wellbeing in terms of the measures provided either by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) or the Francis Burnout Inventory (Francis, Kaldor, et al., 2005). The Maslach Burnout Inventory proposes three components and measures related to burnout (high emotional exhaustion, high depersonalisation, and lack of personal accomplishment). According to this sequential model, burnout is experienced incrementally in the sense of emotional exhaustion leading to depersonalisation and depersonalisation leading to lack of personal accomplishment. The Francis Burnout Inventory proposes two components and measures related to burnout (high emotional exhaustion in ministry and low satisfaction in ministry). According to the balanced affect model employed by the Francis Burnout Inventory, high levels of satisfaction in ministry (positive affect) can offset some of the detrimental consequences of high levels of emotional exhaustion in ministry (negative affect).

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Studies employing the (Maslach & Jackson, 1986) model of burnout among Anglican clergy serving in the Church of England or the Church in Wales have been reported by Francis and Rutledge (2000), Rutledge and Francis (2004), Hills et al. (2004), Francis and Turton (2004a, 2004b), Randall (2004, 2005, 2007, 2013a), and Turton and Francis (2007). Studies employing the (Francis, Village, Robbins & Wulff, 2011) model of burnout among Anglican clergy serving in the Church of England or the Church in Wales have been reported by Robbins and Francis (2010), Brewster et al. (2011), Randall (2013a, 2013b, 2015), Francis, Payne, et al. (2013), Francis et al. (2015, 2017), Francis, Ratter, et al. (2015), Village et al. (2018), Francis, Emslie, et al. (2019), and Francis, Laycock, et al. (2019). Set within the broader context of international studies employing the same measures of work-related psychological health and wellbeing, a number of conclusions can be drawn regarding the correlates, antecedents, and consequences of poor work-related psychological health among clergy (see Francis, 2018).

Of particular practical application within this family of inter-related studies are the findings from those analyses specifically concerned to examine the effect of a range of personal, professional, and lifestyle factors on mitigating poor work-related psychological wellbeing. For example, Francis and Turton (2004a) demonstrated the positive effect of regular engagement with supervision designed to encourage reflective practice in ministry. Turton and Francis (2007) demonstrated the positive association between confidence in prayer and better work-related psychological wellbeing. Francis, Robbins, et al. (2013) demonstrated the positive association between having a mentor or taking study leave and better work-related psychological wellbeing. On the other hand, when Francis et al. (2007) tested the thesis that companion animals (specifically cats and dogs) may contributed to work-related psychological wellbeing, their data demonstrated that no psychological benefit occurred from owning a cat and that the ownership of a dog was associated with poorer work-related psychological wellbeing.

Working within this research tradition, and drawing on secondary analysis of data generated by the Church Growth Research Programme (see Voas & Watt, 2014) among 1268 full-time stipendiary Church of England clergy aged 68 or under, Francis et al. (2018) tested the extent to which the sense of feeling supported may mitigate levels of stress experienced by clergy. The Church Growth Research Programme included two items relevant for testing this thesis. The first was based on the question "Among your family, colleagues and contacts, do you have someone with whom you are able to be completely honest, who encourages and supports you and is really concerned for you in your daily life and work?" The forced-choice answers were "none" (= 1), "yes, one other person" (= 2), "yes, two other people" (= 3), and "yes, three or more other people" (= 4). This response was treated as a ordinal measure of "Informal Support". The second item asked "How much support do you receive from professional advisors?" and was binary coded as "Very little support" or "Some support but not enough" (= 1) and "A reasonable amount of support" or "A great deal of support" (= 2).

Francis et al. (2018) explored these data both in terms of bivariate correlations and in terms of regression models that took into account the effects of personal factors (sex and age), psychological factors (emotionality and psychological type), environmental factors (home-related and church-related), and theological or ecclesial factors (Anglo-Catholic versus Evangelical, Liberal versus Conservative, and Charismatic versus not-Charismatic). The bivariate correlations suggested that perceptions both of informal support and of

formal support are associated with lower levels of stress, while at the same time the perception of informal support and the perception of formal support are significantly correlated. The regression model, however, suggested that the real impact of feeling supported on reducing levels of stress is routed through the perception of formal support. In this sense, formal support is crucial to maintaining better levels of work-related psychological wellbeing among clergy.

The Covid-19 pandemic

Covid-19 took the world by surprise and took the world by storm. Decisive action was needed and decisive action was effected. In England, the government imposed a lockdown on the nation on 23 March 2020. The following day the Church of England imposed a lock-up on all its churches. Churches were closed completely, even for private prayer, and even for the clergy. Clergy that may have been accustomed to seeing the parish church as their natural habitat and as the centre for liturgical and pastoral ministry needed to discover new ways through which to deliver ministry and mission and to fulfil the call and obligations of their ordination vows.

Precisely how the Church of England effected the lock-up of churches and how this may have been perceived by clergy has been helpfully documented and discussed by McGowan (2020). In particular McGowan points to three puzzles or contradictions within the Archbishops' approach to the lock-up through which the pandemic may have brought to the surface longstanding tensions within the Church of England between its two roots within the Reformed tradition shaping the Evangelical wing of the Church of England (see Hylson-Smith, 1988) and within the Catholic tradition shaping the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England (see Hylson-Smith, 1993). The lasting and underlying persistence of those tensions have been documented in empirical studies, reported by Randall (2005), Francis, Robbins, et al. (2005), and Village (2012, 2018), that support continuing significant differences between clergy and laity shaped within the Evangelical wing and those shaped within the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England.

The first puzzle concerns the weight attributed to the local place and to the sacred space. The way in which the lock-up was effected assumed that these aspects of the Anglican tradition may not have been central to the way in which clergy conceived their ministry and mission. In the world of the pandemic the significance of the local altar for the eucharistic celebration could be replaced by the kitchen table made globally accessible by Zoom. Such a transition may have been particularly stressful for some clergy, and perhaps especially so for those shaped in the Anglo-Catholic tradition.

The second puzzle concerns the weight attributed to the various forms of ministry or service offered by the Anglican Church and for which the local place and the sacred space should remain available. McGowan (2020) draws specific attention to the Church of England's guidance:

Our church buildings are therefore now closed for public worship, private prayer and all other meetings and activities except for vital community services until further notice. (McGowan, 2020, p. 4)

The irony of the choice of the term "services" was not lost on McGowan (2020). Where once the vital services offered to the community by local clergy may have included

divine worship, now meeting physical needs (through food banks) trumps meeting spiritual needs (through divine worship). Such a transition may have been stressful for some clergy.

The third puzzle concerned the weight attributed to the role of clergy within the pandemic. In the clarifying letter of 27 March purporting to be from all the bishops the Archbishops emphasised that:

We must lead by example. Staying home and demonstrating solidarity with the rest of the country at this testing time is, we believe, the right way of helping and ministering to our nation. (McGowan, 2020, p. 3)

The irony is not lost on McGowan (2020) of the contrast between the role of Anglican clergy as construed by the Archbishops and the role of “religious staff” as construed by Government directives. These directives placed religious staff among those “key workers” whose children could attend the provisions still being offered in schools. Such a transition from key worker to home worker may have been stressful for some clergy.

Some indication that these puzzles or contradictions may have been stressful for Anglican clergy emerged quite quickly in the pages of the *Church Times*. The first edition after lockdown carried the following poignant and anonymous letter:

As a clergyman, unsurprisingly I have been working flat out to minister to the dear people in my care during this fast-changing situation. I am sure that this is the case for virtually all of us ... During this time I have not heard of, or received, an iota of expressed love, regard, care, or concern to the clergy from our authorities regarding our wellbeing. (*Church Times*, 27 March 2020, p. 14)

This letter so well captures the research question posed by Francis et al. (2018) and focuses it at the heart of understanding the effects of the pandemic on the wellbeing of Anglican clergy. The question concerns the connection between stress levels and the effects of feeling supported.

Research questions

Against this background, the aim of the present study is to draw on new data generated by the *Coronavirus, Church & You* survey hosted online between 8 May and 23 July 2020 in order to address four research questions specifically related to the Church of England clergy who participated in the survey.

The first research question concerns exploring the measure of wellbeing included in the survey to map the perceived changes in wellbeing experienced by Anglican clergy specifically during this significant period of national lockdown and the lock-up of their churches.

The second research question concerns exploring the measure of perceived support included in the survey to map the levels of support that Anglican clergy perceived from diverse sources during this significant period of national lockdown and the lock-up of their churches.

The third research question concerns exploring the effect of core demographic predictors on the wellbeing of Anglican clergy in terms of sex, age, church tradition (differentiating between Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic), and ministry status (differentiating between stipendiary and self-supporting).

The fourth research question concerns exploring the effect of perceived levels of support on the wellbeing of Anglican clergy, after controlling for relevant demographic factors.

Method

Procedure

In April 2020 the *Coronavirus, Church & You* online survey was developed and launched on the Qualtrics platform. A link to the survey was distributed through the online and paper versions of the *Church Times*, the main newspaper of the Church of England, from the beginning of May. The link was also distributed to the Church of England dioceses and other denominations, including Baptists and Methodists. The survey invited both clergy and lay people to respond, and there were items that allowed us to identify whether a respondent was ordained and their current role (including being retired). The survey closed on 23 July 2020, by which time there were over 7000 replies, 5347 of which were from respondents affiliated with the Church of England. Of these, 1429 were clergy, 759 were lay ministers, and the remainder were lay people who were not licensed to an authorised ministry. This study is based on a convenience sub-sample of 1429 clergy who answered all the questions necessary for the analyses. In 2019 there were approximately 20,000 active clergy serving in the Church of England, of whom about 7000 were retired clergy still active in ministry (Church of England, 2020).

Participants

Of 1429 Church of England clergy on whom the present analyses are based, 66% were in stipendiary ministry, 15% were in self-supporting ministry, and 19% were retired. In the overall sample, 53% were men and 47% were women, though the proportion of women varied between stipendiary (47% women), self-supporting (65% women), and retired (36% women) clergy. Comparable national figures for all active ordained ministers in 2019 were 68% men and 32% women, with the percentage of women being 31% in stipendiary ministry, 51% in self-supporting ministry, and 26% among those with permission or licence to officiate (Church of England, 2020). In the current sample, 9% were aged less than 40, 17% were in their 40s, 27% in their 50s, and 47% were 60 or over. Comparable national figures for 2019 were 6%, 11%, 20%, and 62% respectively. The study sample may have over sampled female and younger clergy compared with the overall pool of clergy.

Instrument

The *Coronavirus, Church & You* survey contained the following measures that are employed in the present analyses.

Demographic measures included: sex (0 = male, 1 = female); age (by decade 1 = 18–19, 2 = 20s, 3 = 30s, etc.), and since there were very few teenagers in the sample, these were recoded into the 20s age group; and clergy status using a five-response item: Stipendiary parochial (55%), Stipendiary extra-parochial (5%), Self-supporting ministry (15%), Retired

and still in active ministry (17%), Retired and no longer in active ministry (3%), Other (5%). Four dummy variables were created from the clergy status: Stipendiary-parochial, Self-supporting, Retired-active, and Retired-inactive plus others, with the latter used as the reference group in regressions.

Church tradition was measured using a single seven-point, bipolar response scale anchored at one end by “Anglo-Catholic” and at the other by “Evangelical”. This scale has been widely used and tested among Church of England clergy and laypeople and shown to be a robust predictor of attitudes and beliefs associated with the two main wings of the Church (Randall, 2005; Village, 2012, 2018). The scale was used to identify those affiliating as Anglo-Catholic (scores 1–2), Broad Church (scores 3–5), and Evangelical (scores 6–7). Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical were used as dummy variables in regressions, with Broad Church as the reference category.

Wellbeing measures were provided by a pool of 20 items that covered various aspects of wellbeing such as fatigue, disengagement, positivity, closeness to other people, and closeness to God. To avoid confusion, items were presented on a three-point bipolar scale with negative outcome in the left column and positive outcome in the right column (Appendix), with radio buttons between them to indicate if that aspect of wellbeing had declined, increased or remained unchanged during the lockdown. Summated rating scales were created using an exploratory factor analysis (Principal Components extraction with oblimin rotation). Items were then grouped into scales and tested for internal consistency reliability (Cronbach, 1951). This procedure produced five measures of wellbeing (Table 1) termed Fatigue (four items, $\alpha = .82$), Disengagement (four items, $\alpha = .68$), Positivity (four items, $\alpha = .65$), Closeness to others (three items, $\alpha = .65$), and Closeness to God (two items, $\alpha = .78$). Three items failed to load well on any factor and were

Table 1. Change in levels of wellbeing across five areas.

	CITC	Less %	Same %	More %
Fatigue ($\alpha = .84$)				
Less exhausted: More exhausted	.693	19	33	48
Calmer: More anxious	.552	19	43	38
Less stressed: More stressed	.693	22	40	37
Less fatigued: More fatigued	.723	16	30	54
Disengagement ($\alpha = .68$)				
Less creative: More creative ^a	.419	17	33	50
Less excited: More excited ^a	.541	32	53	15
Less bored: More bored	.453	20	57	23
Less frustrated: More frustrated	.436	11	42	46
Positivity ($\alpha = .65$)				
Less thankful: More thankful	.477	4	38	59
Less hopeful: More hopeful	.490	15	52	33
Less trusting: More trusting	.422	10	63	27
Unhappier: Happier	.336	24	59	17
Closeness to others ($\alpha = .61$)				
Further from others: Closer to others	.510	39	37	23
Further from church: Closer to church	.387	36	43	21
Further from family: Closer to family	.368	36	32	32
Closeness to God ($\alpha = .75$)				
Less prayerful: More prayerful	.604	14	36	50
Further from God: Closer to God	.604	6	50	43

Note: $N = 1429$. α = Cronbach's alpha. CITC = Corrected Item-Total Correlation.

^aThese items were reverse coded to produce the scale of disengagement.

excluded. Fatigue and disengagement were coded so that a high score indicated an increase in negative aspects of wellbeing during the lockdown.

Perceived support was measured using ten items (Table 2) introduced by the rubric “In general, how well have you been supported by:”. Not all of the areas of support would be relevant for all clergy. For example, clergy living alone would not have had support from a household, and not all clergy (especially retired clergy) would have been in contact with funeral directors or hospitals during the lockdown. Respondents were therefore instructed to complete only those items applicable to their situation. Where respondents did expect support from a particular source, there was a three-point response scale (1 = no support, 2 = some support, 3 = well supported). This was recoded into a dummy variable such that 1 = well supported, 0 = no or some support. Because sample size varied between items, each was tested individually against wellbeing measures.

Analysis

The first stage in analysis was to examine changes in wellbeing and perceived support across the sample. The second stage was to examine the correlation of the five different measures of wellbeing. These measures were then used as dependent variables in a series of multiple regression analyses using sex, age, ministry status (dummy variables: stipendiary, self-supporting, and retired), and church tradition (dummy variables: Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical) as predictor variables. In the final stage, fatigue and disengagement scores were regressed against levels of support (dummy variable: well supported, controlling for age and church tradition), in each case using only those clergy who expected to receive support from that source. All analyses were performed using SPSS 26 (IBM Corporation, 2020).

Results

Levels of wellbeing

A relatively high proportion of Church of England clergy appeared to suffer decline in levels of wellbeing during the pandemic, mainly in areas related to fatigue (Table 1).

Table 2. Clergy perceptions of support from various sources.

Source of support	Applicable		Perceived support (where applicable)		
	N	%	None %	Some %	Good %
Household	1041	73	2	14	83
Ministry team	1080	76	7	36	57
Congregation	1112	78	6	46	48
Funeral directors	899	63	18	34	47
Bishop	1121	78	14	45	41
Diocese	1126	79	10	52	38
IT Experts	1039	73	26	40	34
Public	1003	70	28	44	27
Hospitals	673	47	42	34	25
Church nationally	1090	76	24	53	23

Note: Applicable = number of clergy for whom this source was relevant and/or who expected support from this source (and as a percentage of the total sample of 1429).

About half reported increases in fatigue (54%) and exhaustion (48%), and over a third increases in anxiety (38%) and stress (37%). On average across the four fatigue-related items, 37% reported no change. Changes in items related to disengagement were slightly less marked: on average across these four items, 46% reported no change. Just under half reported increases in frustration (46%), a third reported reduction in excitement (32%), nearly a quarter increases in boredom (23%), and nearly a fifth reduction in creativity (17%). Less than a quarter of clergy reported a reduction in any the four positivity items, and about three fifths reported increased thankfulness (59%). These may have related to the specifics of the general social response to the pandemic, with thankfulness to the NHS featuring prominently in the media and more people attending to the needs of self-isolated or shielding neighbours. Just over a third reported feeling less close to other people (39%), church (36%), or family (36%), but closeness to God tended to increase, with 43% experiencing increased closeness to God and 50% experiencing increased prayerfulness.

Levels of perceived support

Most clergy perceived a range of possible sources of support applicable to their situation, with around three-quarters expecting support from the diocese (79%), the bishop (78%), the congregation (78%), the Church nationally (76%), the ministry team (76%), their household (73%), IT experts (73%), and the public (70%) (Table 2). The two exceptions were funeral directors (63%) and hospitals (47%), presumably because many clergy had not been required to minister in these areas when they completed the survey. The level of support varied considerably between sources, with household support, where it was applicable, scoring well above others at 83% as well supported. For clergy trapped at home this was obviously going to be an important promoter of wellbeing, and it was good to see it worked well for most who lived with others. Local church sources were slightly less supportive, but still around half the clergy felt well supported by ministry teams (57%) or congregations (48%). Of the clergy who interacted with funeral directors during the pandemic, just under a half felt well supported (47%). Funerals and processes around death and bereavement were particularly difficult during the lockdown because even relatives were often excluded at the time of deaths in hospitals, and funeral gatherings were severely curtailed. Although some three quarters of clergy seemed to expect support from the Church of England nationally, just under a quarter of those who expected such support felt well supported (23%) and almost a quarter (24%) felt they had no support.

Correlation of wellbeing measures

The various measures of wellbeing were correlated with one another in ways that might be expected (Table 3). Thus, fatigue and disengagement were positively correlated with each other, but negatively correlated with the other three scales. Coefficients were relatively low, especially between fatigue and positivity or closeness in relationships, suggesting that the increased demands on clergy during lockdown may have raised stress, but not necessarily affected their closeness to others or their closeness to God. Further work would be needed to see if the kind of balanced affect model that has

Table 3. Correlation matrix for measures of wellbeing.

		5	4	3	2
1	Fatigue	-.231***	-.233***	-.430***	.472***
2	Disengagement	-.326***	-.404***	-.522***	
3	Positivity	.405***	.412***		
4	Closeness to others	.295***			
5	Closeness to God				

Note: *** $p < .001$.

been reported elsewhere in studies of clergy burnout (Francis, Village, et al. 2015; Francis et al., 2011; Village et al., 2018) might be operating in a parallel manner here.

Predictors of wellbeing

Results of regression of the five measures of wellbeing against demographic predictors (sex, age, church tradition, and ministry status) are shown in Table 4. In general, there was little difference between the various groups in the levels of wellbeing, and these predictors explained only a few percent of the variance in the five measures. Age was the most consistent predictor, with younger clergy experiencing more fatigue, greater disengagement, and poorer relationships than did older clergy. Age may also have explained differences between stipendiary and active retired clergy: in bivariate correlations, for example, fatigue was higher among stipendiary parochial clergy and lower among active retired clergy, but these differences largely disappeared when age was controlled for. Stipendiary clergy remained slightly more fatigued than other clergy when age was in the model, but this was the only statistically significance difference across all five measures. Church tradition explained some of the variance in disengagement, with Anglo-Catholics indicating greater increases than other traditions but, apart from this, wellbeing seemed similar between traditions across the various measures.

Effect of personal support on fatigue and disengagement

Correlations between support and wellbeing (fatigue and disengagement) were tested separately for each measure of support (after controlling for age and church tradition) because of the inherently variable sample size in measures of support (Table 5). Most

Table 4. Summary of regression of wellbeing measures.

	Fatigue β	Disengagement β	Positivity β	Closeness to	
				Others β	God β
Sex (female)	.051 ⁺	.017	.025	.020	.046 ⁺
Age	-.178***	-.082*	.034	.087*	.103***
Anglo-Catholic	.054 ⁺	.111***	-.060*	-.047 ⁺	.009
Evangelical	.022	-.021	.049 ⁺	.020	.055 ⁺
Stipendiary	.096*	.008	.014	-.016	.032
Self-supporting	.021	-.008	.022	-.024	-.014
Active retired	-.003	.016	.017	-.018	.044
R ²	.061***	.019***	.011*	.011*	.017**

Note: $N = 1429$. ⁺ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. For explanation of the dummy variables, see the Methods section of the text.

Table 5. Regressions of fatigue and disengagement against sources of support.

	Fatigue β	Disengagement β
Household	-.089**	-.128***
Ministry Team	-.101**	-.154***
Congregation	-.108***	-.119***
Public	-.138***	-.163***
Diocese	-.085**	-.143***
Bishop	-.085**	-.157***
Church Nationally	-.132***	-.219***
IT Experts	-.109***	-.124***
Funeral directors	-.015	-.028
Hospitals	-.066	-.064

Note: In each row, support related to those clergy for whom this source was applicable (for sample sizes, see Table 2). Support was a dummy variable with 1 = well-supported and 0 = no or some support. Controlled for age and church tradition. ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

sources of support were negatively correlated with measures of fatigue and disengagement, apart from funeral directors and hospitals, which were less relevant to most clergy anyway. Correlations were generally stronger for disengagement than for fatigue, so while feeling well-supported may have helped to alleviate some aspects of poor wellbeing, fatigue was more difficult to contain. The strongest correlation was between disengagement and support from the church nationally. It might be that what is most crucially needed from the national church is the sense of being supported, rather than practical support as such. In theory, all clergy would have had similar access to the national church support, but it was those who felt well-supported who had less detriment to their mood. The tone set by national leaders, and how that is perceived locally, might affect the mood of clergy more than anything else.

Discussion and conclusion

This study drew on new data generated by the *Coronavirus, Church & You* survey hosted online between 8 May and 23 July 2020, a period during which in England the government had imposed a lockdown on the nation and the Church of England had imposed a lock-up on all its churches, in order to assess wellbeing and perceptions of receiving support among Church of England clergy at the initial height of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, the study sought to address four research questions.

The first research question concerned mapping the perceived changes in wellbeing experienced by Anglican clergy during this significant period of lockdown and lock-up of their churches. In addressing this question factor analysis distinguished among five different aspects of wellbeing that we characterised as indicators of fatigue, disengagement, positivity, closeness to others, and closeness to God. Drawing on this conceptualisation, the data drew attention to considerable increases in levels of fatigue and in levels of disengagement. As indicators of increased fatigue, 48% of clergy pointed to higher levels of exhaustion and 54% pointed to higher levels of fatigue. As indicators of increased disengagement, 46% of clergy pointed to higher levels of frustration and 50% pointed to lower levels of creativity. As is consistent with the classic model of balanced affect (Bradburn, 1969), this clear increase in fatigue and in disengagement is not inconsistent with concomitant increases in positivity. As indicators of increased positivity 59% of clergy

pointed to higher levels of thankfulness and a third pointed to increased hopefulness. The classic model of balanced affect suggests that increased levels of positive affect help to mitigate the detrimental effects of increased levels of negative affect (see, Francis et al., 2011; Francis, Village, et al., 2015; Village et al., 2018). An inevitable consequence of the lockdown and of the lock-up is that some clergy experienced erosion in their closeness to other people. At the same time, however, some clergy experienced enhancement in their closeness to God. As indicators of this contrast, 39% of clergy pointed to feeling less close to other people, while 43% of clergy pointed to feeling closer to God.

The second research question concerned mapping the levels of support that Anglican clergy perceived from diverse sources during the significant period of lockdown and lock-up of their churches. In addressing this question, the analysis concentrated on two issues. The first issue concerned the extent to which clergy considered it appropriate to expect support from different sources. The data demonstrated that high expectation was placed on the church structures themselves. Such expectation resonates strongly with Anglican ecclesiology and polity in which parish clergy are licensed to share with the bishop pastoral oversight and care within a specific parish or area of the diocese. As indicators of this expectation, 78% of clergy considered it reasonable to look to the bishop for support, and 76% considered it reasonable to look to the national Church for support. Of the 1121 clergy who expected support from the bishops, 41% had felt well supported. Of the 1090 clergy who expected support from the national Church, 23% had felt well supported. Many clergy may also see their household as a source of support, but not all clergy live as part of a household. The data demonstrated that 73% of clergy considered it reasonable to look to their household for support. Of the 1041 clergy who expected support from their household, 83% felt well supported. These statistics suggest that perhaps the Church could have been a more visible support for the clergy during the pandemic, and that the heartfelt, but anonymous, letter published in the *Church Times* for 27 March 2020, may have been voicing what many others were feeling.

The third research question concerned exploring the effect of core demographic predictors on the wellbeing of Anglican clergy, in terms of sex, age, church tradition, and ministry status. Three main features emerge from the data that address this specific question. The first feature is that higher levels of fatigue were reported by the younger clergy. The negative association between age and fatigue or burnout has been documented by a number of studies among clergy, including work reported by Francis et al. (2004), Francis, Kaldor, et al. (2005), and Francis, Robbins, et al. (2013). Two theories may account for these differences between younger and older clergy. On the one hand, Maslach et al. (2001) suggest that those who burnout early in their careers are likely to quit their jobs, leaving behind the survivors who consequently exhibit lower levels of burnout. In other words, younger clergy who suffer from emotional exhaustion or depersonalisation may decide to leave parochial ministry either because of ill health or to seek alternative employment. On the other hand, older clergy may have learned how to pace their work better so as to avoid such signs of burnout. The second feature is that higher levels of fatigue were reported by stipendiary clergy than by self-supporting clergy and retired clergy. This finding is consistent with the view that the lockdown and the lock-up made greatest impact on those engaged in full-time stipendiary ministry. The third feature is that Anglo-Catholic clergy

experienced higher levels of disengagement as a consequence of the lockdown and the lock-up. This finding is consistent with the view that Anglo-Catholic clergy may have been more likely to have experienced the sense of damage and deprivation in exclusion from their churches as the locus for personal prayer and for public services (see further Francis & Village, [under review](#)).

The fourth research question concerned exploring the effect of perceived levels of support on the wellbeing of Anglican clergy after controlling for relevant demographic factors. The data confirmed the findings of the earlier study reported by Francis et al. (2018) concerning the beneficial effects of feeling supported. Higher sense of receiving support was associated with smaller increases in fatigue and smaller increases in disengagement as reported by clergy during the pandemic. In particular, the regression model on disengagement drew attention to the strong path from the perception of being supported by the national Church to reduced levels of disengagement. Alongside the effective reduction in disengagement that comes from the local experience of being supported by the household, the ministry team, the public and the congregation, and from the regional experience of being supported by the diocese and the bishop, the perception of being supported by the national Church has a big part to play. This finding has to be read against the evidence that under a quarter of those clergy who expected support from the national Church felt well supported and almost a quarter felt that they had no support at all from this source. It might be that local support was always going to be more visible and important under lockdown conditions, but the national Church may need to consider whether and how it communicates meaningfully with its clergy. It seemed that some clergy may have expected more support than they thought they received, but for those who thought that they had received such support the effect was really significant.

The present study has provided a snapshot of how the Church of England clergy experienced the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic period during the time of the initial lockdown and lock-up between 8 May and 23 July. The study was limited by the need to use a measure of wellbeing that was relevant to both clergy and lay people, and which would assess changes in wellbeing since the lockdown began. This precluded the use of measures of wellbeing such as the Francis Burnout Inventory, that have been developed specifically for clergy. The survey recorded immediate effects of the initial lockdown, and it would be useful to do a follow-up survey that assessed perceived wellbeing at later stages in the trajectory of the pandemic.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee for the School of Humanities, Religion and Philosophy at York St John University (approval code: HRP-RS-AV-04-20-01). All participants had to affirm they were 18 or over and give their informed consent by ticking a box that gave access to the rest of the survey.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix

Items used in the wellbeing question

	–	0	+	
More exhausted				Less exhausted
Less creative				More creative
Less excited				More excited
More anxious				Calmer
Unhappier				Happier
More stressed				Less stressed
Less prayerful				More prayerful
Further from God				Closer to God
Further from others				Closer to others
Further from church				Closer to church
Further from family				Closer to family
Less thankful				More thankful
Less hopeful				More hopeful
Less neighbourly				More neighbourly
Less trusting				More trusting
More guilty				Less guilty
Less obedient				More obedient
More fatigued				Less fatigued
More bored				Less bored
More frustrated				Less frustrated

Note: The question was introduced by the following rubric: *How would you rate the effect of the lockdown on you so far? (Please click one button EACH row to indicate a positive (+) or negative (–) effect. The middle button (0) indicates no effect of the lockdown)*